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Herder's Conception of Popular Poetry

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HERDER'S CONCEPTION OF POPULAR POETRY

BY

LOUISE KATHRYN GOEBEL

THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN GERMAN

IN THE

COLLEGE OF LITERATURE AND ARTS

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Presented, June, 1912

1912
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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

May 24 1982

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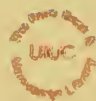


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It is my object in this essay not to treat of the history of the Volkslied movement in detail, but rather to point out the impetus Herder gave this movement, his conception of the Volkslied, and the importance of this movement for the future development of German literature. In fact I wish to show that the regeneration of German poetry that came at the end of the eighteenth century was due to Herder; that his discussions on the nature of poetry revolutionized the very essence of aesthetic maxims concerning poetry.

In order to understand the importance of Herder's work we must know something of the literary age in which he lived. A brief discussion of eighteenth^{century} literature is necessary. The eighteenth century is one of renaissance, a crisis in the history of the development of human thought. The two literary movements which characterize the age, the one, the conscious effort of expression culminating in Kant, the other, the unconscious represented by Herder and Goethe, were born in the German Volksseele in the last decades of the previous century. Both movements in the end tended in the same direction, the breaking away from the overpowering influence of Franco-Roman culture. It is the movement with which Herder identified himself that we are chiefly concerned. This movement was at once national and popular. It was conceived in the name of Nature as opposed to culture, in the name of true feeling in opposition to reason, in the name of genie versus the pedantic aesthetic rules then prevalent.

In the latter years of the seventeenth century Germany felt a degree of shame that her vernacular literature was suffering from a lack of good taste, artistic finish and nobility of expression.

The increasing recognition of this fact led to a new literary movement which was characterized by the extensive importation of foreign ideas and forms. ... "Man versificiert und dichtet roemisch ... Das Volk verstand diese Sprache nicht, und aufs Volk konnte die Dichtkunst also nicht wirken, der beste lebendige Zweck der Guete ging also verloren. Gelehrte schrieben fuer Gelehrten, Pedanten fuer Pedanten, die meisten, (wie ihre herrliche Auslegung der Alten zeigt) gar keine Wirkung der Dichtkunst faehig waren. Schrieb man also fuer die, so brauchte es auch keine poetischen Talente, keine Kraft und Absicht zur Wirkung. Die Muster der Alten waren da, schrieb man nur wie diese, in schoenen abgemessenen Zeilen, nach allen oft sehr elend, abgezogenen aeussere[n] Regeln, Geist der Alten moechte seyn, wo er wollte, ein Schreiber klatschte dem andern zu: 'Du bist klassisch, ich bins auch! jene, das Volk, sind Barbaren, Pöbel der lieben Frau Muttersprache sind verflucht!' So wurde nun elende, kraftlose, gemahlte Schatten geheiligt; sie waren der Traum von einem Traum und wurden Muster. Und so ward Dichtkunst nun das laue Ding, das niemand zu haben und zu geniessen wusste, der Natur, dem Sinne des Volks seinem Herzen, dem Herzen des Dichters selbst fremd."*

At the same time there was a reformatory agitation which had for its object the improvement of the vernacular, a growing opposition to the didactic arbitrary rule and fashion, a gradual return to nature, a slowly advancing emancipation of the individual feeling, a struggle against conventionalism and pedantry.

The former movement was due to the educated few, the nobles, who swayed public and literary matters alike. Public life became more and more the prey of an aristocracy devoid of moral dignity

* Suphan, Herder's Saemmtliche Werke, vol. B, pt. 2, chapter 3, p. 417.
Ueber die Wirkung der Dichtkunst.

and national aspirations. Its influence upon literature was constantly waning. The apparent symptom of decay was a condition necessary to the growth of a new literature and society. Private morality now became the chief concern. Freedom and humanity became matters of the heart. Literature, by taking part in this new movement, by concentrating its attention upon the inner self, by clinging to the idea that nature should dominate, that the heart is the seat of all true feeling, that culture and reason should hold a second place, & helped to bring about the final glorious rejuvenation of poetry, in particular, at the end of the century.

German scholars gradually became more and more conscious that Germany was saturated with the poisonous influence coming chiefly from France, which was fast consuming her and her people. Franco-Roman customs, ideals, culture dominated Europe, particularly Germany. "In olden times Germany was the land of honesty, now it has come to be a lumber-room where other nations store their crimes and vices"¹. No one is honored among us who knows no French; we disclaim and condemn our very ancestors because they spoke and felt German². Servants have to wear the livery of their master; can it, then, be true that France is the mistress and Germany the slave? Fie upon thee, Germany, for this shameful bondage"³. Because of this influence humanity, morality, literature was

Longau, Deutsche National Literatur, 28.

¹ Deutschland. Ib. 156.

² Francoesische Sprache. Ib. 176.

³ Francoesische Kleidung. Ib. 162.

decaying. It became the mission of the younger poets of the eighteenth century to build out of the ruin and debris of the old empire, a new, conceived in the spirit of nationality, reality, truth and nature. It was their mission to see that art was appreciated, not by an educated few, that it served merely as a pastime, but that it should come from the people, it should serve the nation itself, and for its moral and aesthetic uplifting. This was their mission. How was it carried out?

In the history of literature we very often notice that a perfected and idealized literary art very often becomes artificial, and descends into the ordinary as soon as the artist and poets seek a broader, and therefore an intellectually inferior niveau for their ideal conceptions. Out of this depression there comes a heightening of artistic ideals, a purification of content, due to the exalted spirit of a few earnest individuals. The original artificiality is displaced and the new ideal prevails. In the poetry of the middle ages, following the lofty and exalted expression in church poetry, comes the exaggerated praise of court ladies in the so-called court minnesong. This through Walter von der Vogelweide is concentrated upon womankind in general, and then upon the nation as a whole. Through Neidhart von Reuenthal the lower classes are praised in song, and finally in the next centuries poetry becomes chiefly popular and national.

In essence this is the process in the eighteenth century. Long and tiresome was the path to realization. "Dass die Dichtkunst ueberhaupt eine Welt- und Voelkergabe sei, 'nicht ein privateil einiger feinen gebildeten Maenner" - or as before Goethe Lessing wrote, "Dass unter jeden Himmelsstrich Dichter geboren werden, und dass

lebhaftes Empfindungen kein Vorrecht positiver Völker sind" was difficult for the people of the age to realize. The idea that poetry existed only for the cultured few was still prevalent, and everything that was not cultured or scholarly was adversely criticized. All poetry which is fostered by consciously-creating poets bears within itself the germ of destruction. Certain themes are artificially exhausted, certain tendencies narrowly followed; thus the same motives and forms are followed until exterminated. The remedy can only be found when those diseased forms and rules are stripped off, and in the return to the most primitive folk poetry, to seek nature in poetry - that is, to turn from culture and to descend into the realms of the peasant, to turn to the savage of uncultured lands -. The first step toward this goal came thru Montaigne. He writes, "Die Volkspoesie, ganz Natur wie sie ist, Naivität und Reiz, durch die sie sich der haupt Schönheit der künstlich, vollkommensten poesie gleicht." * Each of these words became a program - the conception of folk poetry with its peculiar characteristics, the portrayal of its natural evolution, the joy because of its naivité, the high conception of its true worth, and above all the gulf which separated it from Kunstdichtung, all were taken up, and with thoroughness.

Among the revolutionary forces during the early eighteenth century, the influence of English poetry and fiction was one of the most important. Pastoral poetry with Thompson's 'Seasons', and Sidney's 'Arcadia' as models flourished in Germany as a means of awakening a new spirit. But it was Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' which gave

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Montaigne, De Cannibal, 1567.

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incentive to one of the most popular kinds of German fiction, the Robinsonaden, and which gave impetus to the great aesthetic and nature movement. Pope's writings opened^{ed} new fields of thought, Swift became the model of satirists, and Milton inspired critics to deliver poetic genius from the dictates of intellect.* Finally it was through Addison's spectator that the Scottish, particularly Chevey Chase, became known to Germany. Through it, too, interest was aroused in the poetry of the American Indian.^o In fact the discovery of America gave great impetus to the nature movement, to the discovery of the common people, to the appreciation of their verse. England was the first to attempt a collection of old ballads. As early as 1712 we find a collection "Wit and Mirth - or Pills to Purge Melancholy", "Tea-Table Miscellany", 1724, "Remains of Ancient Poetry", 1727. All these were known in Germany and particularly to Herder, and they kept alive the spirit of the volks movement. The introduction of the Romanze from -----

* "These abilities (poetic powers) wheresoever they are found, of the inspired gift of God - rarely bestowed, but yet to some in every nation and of the power ... to imbue and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility".

"The Reason of Church Government", preface, Second Book,
St. John's edition, page 479.

^o
Spectator, Number 11, "Story of a Wild and Savage
Maiden".

Spain*, the Ballad from Italy through England and their effect on German literature. Even the lesser poets before Herder, Gleim and Gleist were saturated with this spirit and wrote their works in the spirit of their models. It was left to Herder, however, to develop a theory of the volk song, to show that it was true poetry, that the spirit and taste of the people are not to be found among the so-called cultured but to be traced to that part of the nation which has not imitated foreign customs.

We may ask why Germany and Herder as its chief representative turned to England for aid aside from the fact that the first collection of volk ballads had appeared there. It was because that there the poisonous Roman influence had had least effect, and it was from England's farthest boundary, Scotland, that the greatest influence was felt. In Scotland they first found the courage to print songs from the lips of peasants. This was in 1765 when Percy published his "Reliques of Ancient Poetry". He had not fully caught the spirit for he writes in his introduction: "If they do not dazzle the imagination, they are frequently found to interest the heart". He had discovered one thing, however, that one must turn to the heart for relief. For heart and nature are one in the eighteenth century.

 * See Herder's Essay in 'Zur Schoenen Literatur und Kunst' for a discussion of the origin of the Romanze. 'Romanze, el Romance, lingua Romana' was the name of the language spoken by those people whom Rome had conquered. Italian, Spanish, Portuguese are the outgrowths of this original 'el Romance'. In Spanish 'El Romance' is the name for Mother Tongue. Hence songs in the mother tongue were called Romanzen. The verse form and rhyme are due to Arabic influence. The Arabs brought the rhyme into Europe, it flourished in volk as well as in kunstpoesie. Herder points out that because of the difference in temperament between the northern and southern peoples, there is a difference in rhythm and tone of their poetry. The tone is symbolic of the contents. Herder feels that the most frequent and lasting tone expressed in the Romanze is the gruesome note, 'das grausenhafte'. In this he was mistaken, but his idea was seized upon by writers of the Romanze, and developed upon. Out of this idea grew the German 'Mordgeschichte' and the literature of that character which was so prevalent thruout Europe.

In Herder's essay "Ueber Ossian und die Lieder alter Voelker" we find the very essence of his aesthetic views concerning poetry. It is to this that we must turn for his discussion of volkspoesie, and to see what position he takes in the movement. The fact that Herder believed in the authenticity of the songs of the Celtic Bard does not in any way diminish the power of the essay. He chooses the oldest lyrical productions of various nations for discussion. In fact all those that he gathered, and all those Goethe collected for him ... "Aus den Kehlen der aeltesten Muetterchen", of Middle Ages. By choosing those he points out the similarity between the various languages, and that all uncultured people, think, speak, and express themselves alike. "Die ganze Ton dieser Poesie is so einfoermig, dass man oft Wort fuer Wort uebersetzen, Wendung fuer Wendung, Inversion gegen Inversion uebertragen kann. In allen Laendern Europens hat der Ritter Geist nur ein Woerterbuch, und so auch die Erzaehlungen in Ton desselben. Ballade, Romanze ueberall diesselbe Haupt- und Nebenworte, einerlei Follendungen und Freiheiten im Silbenmasse, in Vorwerfung der Toene und Flicksyblen, selbst einerlei Lieblingslieder, Romantische Pflanzen und Kraeute, Thiere und Voegel".* Here, too, he discovers that poetry was the first means of expression of a primitive people. Lyric poetry preceded all other forms, it contains in germ what we find in the epic, the drama, etc. Poetry is older than prose, it lives in a language, in mythology. Poetry stands at the very beginning of

* "Aenlichkeit der Mittelern Englisch und Deutsche Dichtkunst" aus dem deutschen Museum, 1777. Mueller edition, Stuttgart, 1828.

history; one might almost say it is the source. Primitive poetry, nature poetry, the work of a sensuous, passionate people in which nature identifies itself with the person, where nature speaks and acts, poetry as we find it in the songs of primitive people, is true poetry.

In this poetry of "Die Wilde Voelker", as he terms them, Herder sees first the essence of true poetry, and second, the salvation of a literary taste and intellectual development of his time. Herder proclaimed poetry to be "Die Ausstroemung der Leidenschaft, der Empfindung in Bilde, die stuermenste, sicherste Tochter der menschlichen Seele!"* The feeling and passion revealed in the folksong are most strongly developed among those nations which Herder calls wilde Voelker. "Alle unpolizierten Voelker singen und handeln; was sie handeln singen sie, und singen Abhandlung. Ihre Gesaenge sind das Archiv des Volkes, der Schatz ihre Wissenschaft und Religion ... der Toten ihre Vaeter und der Begebenheit ihre Geschichte, Abdruck ihres Herzens, Bild ihres haeusliches Lebens in Freude und Leid, beim Brautbett und Grab. Die Natur hat ihnen einen Trost gegeben, viele Uebel gegeben ... Freiheitsliebe, Muessigang, Tammel und Gesang. Da mahlen sich alle, da erscheinen alle wie sie sind. Die kriegerische Nation singt Thaten, die zaertliche Liebe. ... Das Volk von warmer Leidenschaft kann nur Leidenschaft, wie das Volk unter schrecklichen Gegenstaenden sich auch schrecklichen Goetter dichtet."^o

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Ossian Essay.

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Vorrede der Volkslieder.

By wilde Voelker Herder does not mean savage people.

He expresses himself thus: "Wissen sie, das je wilder, d.i. je lebendiger, freiwirkender ein Volk ist (mehr heist dieses Wort nicht) desto wilder, d.i. desto lebendiger, freier, sinnlicher, lyrisch handelnder muessen auch, wenn es lieder hat, seine Lieder sein! Je entvernter von kuenstlicher, wissenschaftlicher Denkart, Sprache und Letternart das Volk ist, desto weniger muessen auch seine Lieder fuers Papier gemacht und tote Letternverse sein: von lyrischen, von lebendigen, von gleichsam tanzmaessigen des Gesanges, von lebendiger Gegenwart der Bilder, vom zusammenhange und gleichsam Notdrange des Inhalts, der Empfindungen von Symmetrie der Worte, der Sylben, bei manchen sogar der Buchstaben, vom Gange der Melodie und von hundert andern Sachen, die zur lebendigen Welt, zum Spruch- und Nationalliede gehoeren und mit diesem verschwindet - davon und davon allein haengt das Wesen, der Zweck, die ganze Wunderthaetige Kraft ab, die diese Lieder haben, die Entzueckung, die Priebfeder der ewige Erb- und Lustgesang des Volkes zu sein."*

The poetic expressions are strong, powerful, never vague and insipid as in the court poetry of the age. "Wie stark und fest sind immer die Wilden ausdruecken. Immer die Sachen die sie sagen wollen, sinnlich klar, lebendig anschauend: Den Zweck zu dem sie reden unmittelbar und genau fuehlend: nicht durch Schattenbegriffe, Halbideen und symbolischen Letternverstand (von dem sie in keinem Worte ihre Sprache, da sie fast keine Abstracte haben, wissen) durch alle dess nicht zerstreut: noch minder durch Kuensteleien ...

*

Ossian Essay.

verwirrende Praemeditation verderben - ueber alle diese Schwacchungen des Geistes, soeligunwissend, erfassen sie den ganzen Gedanken mit dem ganzen Worte, und dieses mit jenem." * All these excellencies are due to pure, strong, feeling - "Der Geist, der sie erfuellet, die rohe, einfaeltige, aber grosse, zaueermaessige, feierliche Art ... den jedes so stark gesagte macht ... nur das wollte ich bei dem alten Voelkern ... aus Natur anfuehren." ° The spirit of the Volkslied may be rude and simple, but majestic, powerful, solemn; it is the spirit of natur, "der Geist der Natur" which speaks in them.

This then, is what makes the popular ballad so appealing, that which stirs the heart and soul of man. The longer a song is to remain with a people, the stronger, the more those characteristics appeal to the heart and feeling. It must ^{have} the ability to convert and touch the heart, in spite of all rules and traditions. Volkspoesie is the foundation of all poetry. It is the inner integrity and honor in the heart of a nation. "Poesie ist die Muttersprache des Menschlichen-geschlechts" Thus it is able to withstand the mighty force of centuries and to defy the changes they have brought about. By feeling Herder does not mean merely the ability to perceive the world, but also the power to express that which has been perceived. The highest poetry is that which fulfills these requirements.

Herder turns to the Schadinnavien Volksong to bear out his idea of their innate strength. With masterly intuition he sees a resemblance between all the songs of the Scotch, the American Indians, the Samos. They depict the life of a primitive people living under the same conditions, in a similar environment. "Die Voelker der Erde

*° Ossian Essay.

sind wie einzelne Vörschen, in ihre Kindheit sich einander ähnlicher als in späteren Zeiten, ausgebildeter Charakter.^o They are all meant to be heard, not read. All show a similarity in meter, rhythm, tone and structure, and such a one so artfully constructed, so rapid a movement, so exact, that for the scholar it is hard to follow. Not so, however, with the "lebendige Vöelker" who were accustomed to hear their songs, and not to read them. Then follow Herder's famous words: "Nichts ist staerker und ewiger und schneller und feiner als Gewohnheit des Ohrs!" How true, for in order to appreciate the folksong it must be heard, sung by the native who has grown up with it, who is fully imbued with its spirit. "Sie leot im Ohr des Volkes, auf den Lippen und der Harfe lebendiger Saenger, sie sangen Geschichte, Begebenheit, Geheimniss, Wunder und Zeigen: Sie war die Blume der Eigenheit eines Volks, seiner Sprache und seines Landes, seiner Geschaefte und Vorurtheile, seiner Leidenschaften und Anmassungen, seiner Musik und Seele."^{*}

Herder points out that the essence of lyric poetry, hence of the Volklid, since it is lyrical in nature, is the melodic quality it possesses. Its perfection lied in the melodic movement or music of the passions depicted. Singing for the primitive people is nothing more than a pleasant, musical manner of speech. Their song was capable of all charm of declamatory prose, with which they combined harmonies to make it yet more agreeable. The melodies of these old songs are simple since they were usually accompanied by a horn, bagpipe, or some simple wind instrument. They were simple in content, often

^{*} Vorrede der Volkslieder. "Stimmen der Vöelker in Liedern, Mueller ed.

^o Vgl. Lebensbilder, Suphan ed. vol. 32.

fantastic, often gruesome. The words were chosen to produce the effect of some instrument. Thus only can we explain the haunting 'OH' that runs through the Edward ballad. It is the melancholy groan of the bagpipe which was used to accompany the singer. If a song fails in this, then it has no tone, no poetic modulation, no advancement, although it may contain metaphors and beautiful colorings, descriptions, etc. Or if the modulation is destroyed by a foreign and artificial mood, which some would-be amender had introduced, the whole tone of the song is ruined. But if the song contains a well developed feeling, lyrical mood, may the verse, form and contents be bad, the song will live and will be sung. It will be improved upon by people, but the soul of the song, the poetic tone, and melody will remain. The spirit of the song which alone stirs the soul remains immortal. "Das Lied muss gehoert werden; nicht gesehen, gehoert mit dem Ohr der Seele, dass nicht einzelne sylben allein zaehlt und misst und wegt, sondern auf Fortklang noecht und in ihm fortschwimmt."*

Just as important as Herder's view is concerning the origin of poetry and his ideas concerning the essence of song, are his thoughts on the aesthetic laws of this original poetry. Pedantic critics have hitherto demanded a mechanical application to German poetry of rules abstracted from ancient rhetoricians and writers. "... Wir dichten nicht mehr ... sondern kuensteln uns entweder Thema oder Art, das Thema zu behandeln oder gar beides - unsere klassische Literature ist Paradisevogel, so bunt, so artig, ganz Flug, ganz Hoehe, und - ohne Fusz auf die deutsche Erde."°

* Vorrede der Volkslieder

° Aenlichkeit der mittleren Englischen u deutschen Dichtkunst.

This newly discovered poetry showed such remarkable irregularities in verse form that it was necessary to point out to critics - die so gut sylben zaehlen und skandieren koennen - the beauties of these irregularities. Herder seems to consider the poets as living organisms and from that point of view unfolds these laws from out of their very nature. To him they were a living voice of the people, the spirit of humanity itself which on all occasions let itself be heard, now mild and gruesome, now happy and sad, at every turn revealing deep human truths. Herder ascribes to them such a power because of the strength he felt to lie with the very people who voiced themselves in these songs. For him they were not the rabble nor did they sing for the rabble; they were the very essence, the backbone, so to speak, of the nation. They were "der grosse, ehrwuerdige Theil des Publicums der Volk heist." Out of the poetry of the masses, out of the small, crude, disrespected seeds the gigantic forms of Shakespeare and Spencer grew. If we disregard the populace, the poets have no audience. There is no nation, no language, no poetry which is ours which moves and lives within us. We then write only for scholars and critics who in turn in their attempts at making a literature merely remold what another has said, dress it up in new metaphors and call it praiseworthy. It is only that nation which has preserved these songs and recognized their power, that has built their present literature on a foundation that is national, upon the beliefs and tastes of its own people, on the remains of their own antiquity, that has a national literature and language. Poetry must be the outgrowth of the national instincts and customs,

the natural production of collective human life. "There is the same law of change," Herder writes, "in all mankind and in every individual, nation, and tribe. From bad to the good, from the good to the better and best, from best to the less good, from the less good to the bad; this is the cycle of all things. So it is with art and science; they grow, they blossom, ripen and decay. So it is with language. This is the age of poetry. Language is now a melodious echo out of the world ... the whole life of the people is poetry."

Through imagination, feeling is represented and depicted in these poems. Imagination, however, is based upon the impressions by which our soul, through feeling, receives its knowledge of the exterior world. A true reproduction of our inner feelings can only be given by *abdruck*, as Herder calls it (by an impress) of the exterior world, the world we perceive through our senses. In original poetry we receive an image of this world about us, through form, sound, melody, tone or color. It is transformed from that image of tangible, physical objects, to a reflex image of the intangible, the mysterious; an image of the workings of unperverted minds and hearts, and their attitude toward the outer world. In proportion as the feeling manifested in this poetry is strong and vivid, so its images are strong and vivid. What the eye perceives the soul represents to itself in quick succession. It is the nature of the imagination to work in this way. Thus the 'Springe and Wuerfe' that have troubled many a pedantic schoolmaster, originated in the apparent abruptiveness and incoherency of the popular song. All folk poetry has these springe and wuerfe and that

poetry which has the greatest number is that which was conceived of and fabricated in their midst. By all simple and unlettered people there is no verse that does not contain this dissultory style in the dialogue. The older, the more popular, the livelier, a song is, the bolder and more dissultory the style. It is due to the working and manner of thinking of a primitive under pressure of excitement or some passion. It speaks in an unpremeditated manner without thought of logical conclusion. It is the agitated soul of a man seeking to express in words his over-wrought feelings.* The mind and tongue are tuned, as it were, to the same pitch. He paints with huge strokes single facts, isolated incidents, they are all a part of the picture in his soul. He sums up a succession of striking situations to portray the whole. "Alle Gesaenge solcher wilden Voelker haben ein daseiende Gegenstaende, Handlungen, Begebenheiten, um eine lebendige Welt. Wie reich und vielfach sind da nun Umstaende, gegenwaertige Zuege, Theilvorfaelle! Und alle hat das Auge gesehen! Die Seele stellt sie vor! Das setzt Spruenge und Wuerfe! Es ist kein anderer Zusammenhang unter den Theilen des Gesanges als unter den Baeumen und Gebuesch im Walde, unter

*Wundt, vol.8, pt.2, p.322: "All volkspoesie and production stands in close relation to motions of the mind. They originate from them, they express them alone. The various moods express^{ed} in the songs of work, dance, war, love, etc. are the expressions of various emotions and passions in all intensities and in every manner. These emotions are all original, instinctive, hence it is to be inferred that every species of song is genial and original. For this reason we find that folk poetry deals with every phase of life and rarely leaves any one phase out."

den Felsen und Frotten der Einoede, als unter den Szenen der Begegnung selbst."^{*} Even abstract moral truths are treated in this manner.

They were not appended as was the custom in Herder's time, but true to its higher art they were contained within the song itself.

The linguistic peculiarities of the old folk song were a most important means of poetical expression. It is not in the language of the school grammar, but in that of real life with dialectic peculiarities that the passionate feeling of the oldest songs finds utterance. By the simple dropping out of the article, which is sure to stiffen a sentence, by elision, repetition, and simple words the folk style is gained. "... Die Auslassung eines, der Zusatz eines anderen, die Umschreibung und Wiederholung eines dritten Wortes, nur andere Accent, Blick, Stimme der Rede, durchaus fuer anderen Ton geben koennen? ... beruht nicht auf diesen alle Schoenheit des Gedichts, aller Geist und Kraft der Rede?"^o Herder being gifted with a splendid ear for linguistic features observes that the English language had advantages in this respect, and demanded similar ones for the German poet. He says: "In schnellrollenden, gereimten und komischen Sachen und aus den entgegengesetzten Grunde in den staerksten, heftigsten Stellen der tragischen Leindenschaft, dort in sonderheit in leichtsinnigen Liedern, hier am meisten in den gedrungenen Blankversen haben sie es da nicht oft bemerkt wie schaedlich es uns Deutschen sei, dass wir keine elisionen haben oder uns machen wollen? Unsere Vorfahren haben sie haeufig, zu haeufig gehabt, die Englaender mit ihren Artikeln

 * Ossian Essay.
 o. Ossian Essay.

mit den Vokalen bei unbedeutenden Woertern und Partikeln ... haben sie zu Regeln gemacht; die innere Beschaffenheit, beider Sprache ist in diesen Stuecke ganz einerlei, uns fehlen diese Schleppe Artikel, Partikeln ... oft so sehr und hindern den Gang des Sinnes oder der Leidenschaft - aber wer unter uns wird zu elidieren wagen?"^o

These then are Herder's chief ideas concerning the folk song. Let me quote Dr. Friedrich Theodor Vischer's famous definition of the volkslied as a summary, for it contains in germ Herder's conceptions. "Naive Dichtung ist Volkspoesie, mehr ein gemein Produkt des Volks als ein Werk des Einzelnen ist sie nach Inhalt tief, voll, innig, nach Form entweder kurz und einfach oder lueckenhaft in der Composition, gedraengt, knapp, incorrect in der Ausfuehrung, aber durch die Frische ihrer Unmittelbarkeit im Verjuengungsquelle fuer die Kunst eine Ausgetrockneten Bildung."* In this newly discovered poetry Herder saw the salvation of German literature. He was seeking for the essence of humanity and to establish the regeneration of mankind through the art of poetry. What we demand of poetry, above all, is truth, an inner and an outer truth. The inner truth consists in the proper connection of feelings expressed, for the outer truth is established by a faithful, though embellished reflex of the world. The poet alone can be the bearer of this truth, a creator of a new world. Herder had found a new world, a means of saving literary life of his time, but because of his inability as a poet, and his natural modesty the working out of his ideas were left to a great poetic genius, to Goethe his pupil.

* F. T. Vischer, "Aesthetik".
o Ossian Essay.

To Herder, one may readily say, we owe the most important ideas that held sway during the Sturm und Drang period, but to men like Goethe and Schiller we owe the working out of these ideas and the fruits they later bore. It was the expression of the inner self, the rounding out of individual character, that Herder was striving for. The ideal of human perfection which inspired this feeling was a being lifted above the barrier of his political, social, moral environment, a being in full freedom of his own spiritual nature. Schiller, although not a direct follower of Herder grasped fully the value of these ideas which he had fostered, and in his review of Bürger's poems he sums up these ideas in a masterly way, and gives his famous definition of the Volksdichter:

"Ein Volksdichter im jenem Sinn, wie es Homer seinem Weltalter war ... durfte in unseren Tagen vergeblich gesucht werden. Unsere Welt ist die Homerische nicht mehr, wo alle Glieder der Gesellschaft im Empfinden und Meynen ungefähr dieselbe Stufe einnahm, sich also leicht in derselben Schilderungen erkennen, in denselben Gefuehlen begegnen konnten. ... Ein Volksdichter fuer unsere Zeiten haette also blos zwischen dem allerleichtesten und die allerschwersten die Wahl: entweder sich ausschliessend der Fassungskraft des grossen Hauffens zu bequemen und auf dem Beifall der Gebildeten Klasse Verzicht zu thun, - oder den ungeheuren Abstand der zwischen beiden sich findet, durch die Proesse seiner Kunst aufzuheben und beide Zwecke vereinigt zu verfolgen ... sich an den Kinderverstand des Volkes anzuschmiegen, gross, doch nicht unüberwindlich ist diese Aufgabe ... Er wuerde gleichsam den verlorenen Zustand der Natur zurueckrufen. In stillschweigenden Einverstaendniss mit den vortrefflichsten seiner Zeit wurde er die Herzen des Volkes in

ihre weichsten und bildsamsten Seite lassen, durch das geübte Sehens-
heitsgefühl den sittlichsten Trieben eine Nachhülfe geben und das
Leidenschaftsbeduerfniss das der Alltagsbest so geistlos und oft so
schaedlich befriedigt, fuer die Reinigung der Leidenschaft nutzen. Er
wuerde der aufgeklaerte, verfeinerte Wortuehrer der Volksgefuehle
werden.

Selbst die erhabensten Philosophie des Lebens wuerde
ein solcher Dichter in die einfachsten Gefuehle der Natur aufluessen,
die Resultate des nachsamsten Forschens der Einbildungskraft ueber-
liefern, und die Geheimnisse des Denkers in leicht zu entziffernder
Bildersprache in Kindersinn zu errathen geben."*

In closing let me sum up briefly the conditions in
Germany at the beginning and at the close of the eighteenth century.
At the beginning of the century Germany was seeking to express herself
in every way, and this she accomplished through her poets, during this
era. During the first decades of the century we have the anxiety of
Germany to get a place among the first nations of the world, at the end
she is the leading power in literary thought, with Goethe's thought of
a world literature standing supreme. Bouhours, in the middle of the
sixteenth century declared the German mind unfit for poetry, at the end
of the period Madame De Stael calls Germany 'Das Vaterland des Gedank-
ens'. A new youth for mankind is found in the writings of the Germans,
and in Goethe at the close of the century we find a new world program
laid out. It was the greatest program for new humanity that has ever
been conceived by man. It was the soul of the nation itself seeking

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Schiller's saemmtliche Schriften, vol. 6.

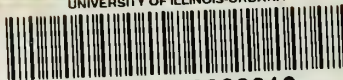
expression in the works of our poets, and developed out of the soul which had renewed itself. At the end of the century Germany was really the center of all literature. She was seeking expression at the beginning, was striving for the Beautiful, finding a definition for aesthetic, seeking to grasp the Real. In her own national life, through her poets, within herself, she found the solution of the problem with which she was wrestling. Through Herder and the Romanticists the importance of old Germanic ideals and ideas were shown. By looking within, returning as it were to her infancy, Germany found the help that she was seeking. At the beginning of the century we have Thomasius fighting for the use of German as a vernacular in his famous lecture 'Von Nachahmung der Franzosen', at the end we have men like Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Grimm, all writing for the intellectual world in Germany only. The position of poets changed from a crawling, little, clown, little respected to the gigantic form of Goethe and his relation to court and the world. Poets became the educators and advisors of dukes and princes. They were no longer, clown and liar, but the apostles of truth. Literature and poetry was no longer characterized by forced brilliancy, bombastic style, and imitation of the classics, it was no more written for the court and a few educated people. Volksdichtung and volkspoesie prevailed. The poets came from the people and wrote for them. The theories of the philosophers of the century that reason could solve all questions, and that pure reason was to dominate all, dissolved before the emphasis which was now placed upon the heart and pure feeling. A natural plant-like unfolding had gone on within the soul of the people.

Literature is the revelation and manifestation of the best that is in a people. Regeneration in a nation itself comes through the change of ideas through generations of its people. It is an unconscious development. The change in the spirit of literature is due to the will of the people, not to the will of an intellectual, biased few, but it is the masses seeking expression that brings reform. "Alle Darstellung und Bilderei kann und soll nur vom Volke kommen, denn dass ist der Spiegel ihrer Vollkommenheit."





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